

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Winnemucca Field Office
5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

CA-370-06-02

Finding of No Significant Impact **Wildlife Water Developments in the High Rock Area**

We have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) CA-370-06-02, *Wildlife Water Developments in the High Rock Area*, dated June 16, 2006. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, we have determined that fencing and development work at three springs associated with Alternative I of the assessment will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

We have determined that the selected alternative is in conformance with the approved Resource Management Plan for Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area and Associated Wilderness, and other Contiguous Lands in Nevada and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal, and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based on our consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context:

The project area is located in northern Washoe County in Nevada and consists of high basalt plateaus dissected by deeply incised canyons. The uplands in the area consist mainly of extensive stands of sagebrush with some small mountain mahogany and aspen stands. The canyon bottoms support wet and dry meadow complexes. Much of this area is now within the East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness and the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area. The area is important wildlife habitat for many Great Basin species including sage-grouse, antelope, and bighorn sheep. Bighorn sheep were reintroduced into the area in 1989 and maintaining a viable population level of bighorn sheep is a high priority for the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) and BLM. The area is also within two separate wild horse & burro Herd Management Areas (HMAs).

Intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Alternative I is anticipated to have beneficial impacts to wildlife, wilderness values, vegetation, and the springs and associated riparian areas. These beneficial impacts would occur because of the elimination of heavy grazing primarily from wild horses that occurs year round at the three meadows. Meadows would be expected to expand in size.

Vegetation cover, composition and structure would be expected to improve within the three exclosures. The exclosures would improve the naturalness of the areas and benefit many wildlife species.

Alternative I will have small scale adverse impacts on the undeveloped and untrammeled character of the wilderness, opportunities for solitude, and visual resources in the area. The exclosure that would be constructed within the Wilderness is in an area that currently contains no development or structures and would have an impact on the undeveloped character of the Wilderness. Short term (about one week) impacts to solitude would occur while constructing the exclosure within the Wilderness as materials are transported by helicopter and a small crew assembles the fence sections. The exclosures would also have an impact to the visual resources, but these impacts would be restricted to a very small area and would impact less than 1% of the area.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Alternative I will have no effect on public health or safety.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The project area is within the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area and a portion of the project area is also within the East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness. The construction of one of the exclosures would impact the natural, undeveloped and untrammeled qualities of the Wilderness. However, this would be offset because the exclosure would reduce the existing impacts to these wilderness characteristics that wild horses may be causing to the spring and the project is considered to be the minimum necessary action for administration of the wilderness area.

It is also anticipated that the exclosures will assist in maintaining viable populations of Great Basin wildlife species, a value that the NCA and wilderness were designated to protect.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

During the scoping period and comment period a high level of public interest was expressed in the outcome of the original proposal to construct artificial water developments within the Wilderness both in support and in opposition of the proposal. The building of any installation or structure within a wilderness generally elicits an elevated level of scrutiny from groups and individuals concerned with maintaining the wilderness values of the area. There has also been a high degree of interest from NDOW and from sportsmen groups and individuals concerned with the wildlife in the area. Additionally, opinions supporting the State of Nevada's role to manage wildlife populations on public lands were received.

Any controversy surrounding the selection of Alternative I is likely to have more to do with the decision not to authorize the water developments proposed by NDOW at this time than with the construction of the exclosures.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

There are no known effects of Alternative I identified in the EA which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

Selecting Alternative I will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. All future proposed management actions in the NCA and Wilderness, if they occur, would be subject to the same environmental assessment standards and independent decision making.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Based on the environmental assessment, no significant cumulative impacts are expected. The proposed action when evaluated together with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable activities in the area would not result in cumulatively significant impacts at the local or watershed scale.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

One of the exclosures (HRSP#20) is located within the High Rock Canyon Agricultural Historic District that is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The exclosure would not have an adverse affect on the historic district. The other two exclosures are not within any district.

Alternative I will not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

No endangered or threatened species or their habitats are within the project area.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action will not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

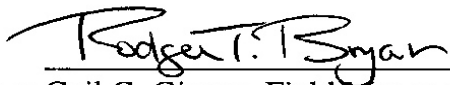
Authorized Officers Signature



Owen Billingsley, Field Manager, Surprise Field Office

June 16, 2006

Date



for Gail G. Givens, Field Manager, Winnemucca Field Office

June 16, 2006

Date

Attachments:

EA # CA-370-06-02